MIKE NOMADS

LAST ECHO

ACTION THRILLER

An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
©2026 Ovi Project Publication - All material is copyright of the Ovi magazine & the writer

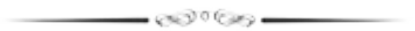
Ovi books are available in Ovi magazine pages and they are for free.
If somebody tries to sell you an Ovi book please contact us immediately.

For details, contact: ovimagazine@yahoo.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, printed or digital,
altered or selectively extracted by any means
(electronic, mechanical, print, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the author or the publisher of this book.

Mike Nomads

Last echo



An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
©2026 Ovi Project Publication - All material is copyright of the Ovi magazine & the writer

The Arctic wind didn't merely howl. It screamed. A frozen, malevolent banshee tearing across the endless ice sheet, scouring the titanium-reinforced skin of Station Nord-7 until the rivets wept frost and the superstructure groaned in protest. The cold here wasn't just a temperature; it was an apex predator, seeking any hairline fracture in the hull to find the warmth of human blood.

Inside the operations hub, the air tasted of ozone and recycled sweat. Gunnery Sergeant Marcus Teal pressed a bloodied palm against the holographic map table, his breath blooming in ragged, crystalline clouds against the dim amber glow of the emergency lights. The primary heaters had died ten minutes ago, and the silence that followed was heavier than the storm.

“Say again, Echo Control,” Teal rasped. His voice was gravel wrapped in rusted steel. “Your last transmission was fragmented. Repeat the count.”

The radio crackled, the signal fighting through a blizzard of electronic interference. “...coming through the ice, Sergeant. Do you copy? They aren’t ours. They aren’t Russian, either. They aren’t anyone’s. Multiple heat blooms converging on your northern perimeter. Fifteen... no, twenty signatures. Heavy armor profiles. They’re moving at sixty knots through a Grade-5 whiteout.”

Teal’s eyes narrowed. At those speeds, they weren’t tanks. They were something else, something built to ignore the laws of sub-zero physics.

“Twenty heavy signatures,” Teal repeated, more to himself than the radio. He looked up, his gaze sweeping over the twelve men and women huddled in the hub. They weren’t the elite shock troops the recruitment posters promised. They were mechanics with grease under their fingernails, drone pilots with bleary eyes, and a cook named Miller who could field-strip a pulse-rifle blindfolded but had never fired one in anger.

They were the forgotten ones, stationed at the edge of the world to guard a secret they weren't cleared to understand.

"Sarge," Miller whispered, his hands trembling as he checked the power cell on his carbine. "The nearest friendly unit is five hundred miles south. They're buried in the same storm. We're off the grid. We're ghosts."

Teal felt the vibration first, a low-frequency thrum that rattled the marrow in his bones. It wasn't the wind. It was the rhythmic thud of hydraulic actuators hitting the permafrost.

"They want a ghost station," Teal said, the sound of a fresh magazine clicking into his carbine echoing like a gavel in the cramped room. He reached out, grabbing Miller by the tactical vest and pulling him close until their visors touched. "Look at me. Forget the miles. Forget the cold. Today, we aren't technicians. We are the wall."

He turned back to the map, his bloody handprint smeared across the sector where the heat blooms flickered like dying stars.

"If they want this rock, they'll have to pay for it

in every inch of frozen dirt," Teal growled, his eyes catching the flicker of the red alarm strobes. "They want a ghost station? Let's give them a graveyard instead."

He punched the manual override for the exterior floodlights. For a heartbeat, the darkness outside was banished. In the glare, he saw them: towering, obsidian shapes emerging from the swirling snow, their hulls jagged and alien.

Then, the first explosion turned the polar night into a blinding, false dawn. The shockwave shattered the reinforced viewing ports, and as the scream of the wind merged with the roar of incoming fire, Marcus Teal stepped into the breach, a ghost ready to fight for his soul.

The house of frozen bones

Station Nord-7 was never supposed to exist. It was a cartographic ghost, a geographical lie etched into the permafrost of the High Arctic.

Officially, it was a joint research facility dedicated to the study of permafrost methane release, a task sufficiently boring and benign to be buried under enough international treaties to choke a career bureaucrat. Unofficially, it was the National Security Agency's ear to the top of the world. It was a signals intelligence black site coiled inside a science lab's skin, listening with digital hunger to Russian, Chinese, and American submarine communications as they threaded the needle through the treacherous transpolar passages.

Marcus Teal had learned this truth exactly three hours and twelve minutes ago.

He could still smell the stale coffee and ozone of the command deck where the station commander, a rail-thin Navy captain named Hollis, had pulled him into a soundproofed maintenance closet. Hollis's eyes were ringed with a fatigue that went deeper than bone; they were the eyes of a man who had seen the end of the world and was just waiting for the clock to run out.

"You're not here for routine security, Gunny," Hollis had whispered, his voice cracking like dry parchment. He fumbled with a handheld recorder, his fingers trembling. "You're here because the last security detail vanished. Twelve MARSOC operators. Gone. No bodies, no blood, no distress calls. Just empty bunks and cold coffee. And two days before they went silent, they flagged this."

Hollis pressed play.

The recording was a haunting whisper, barely rising above the rhythmic thrum of the station's life-support systems. "The Echo doesn't sleep," a man's voice hissed, distorted by terror. "It doesn't just repeat. It multiplies."

There was a burst of static, high-pitched and jagged, followed by a woman's voice. Her English was precise, delivered with a heavy, melodic Russian accent: "We have the algorithm. Prepare the kill switch. The harvest begins at zero-hundred."

* * * * *

Now, eleven hours after that clandestine briefing, Hollis lay face-down in the mess hall. A single bullet hole was centered with surgical precision between his shoulder blades, the dark pool of his blood steaming in the sub-zero air leaking through the damaged vents.

The station's emergency klaxon pulsed, bathing the corridors in a rhythmic, nauseating red light. Marcus Teal didn't have time to mourn. He grabbed the edge of a heavy-duty supply crate, his boots skidding on the linoleum as he dragged it across the main intersection to build a hasty barricade.

"Gunny!"

Corporal Lena Voss slid into the cover of the crate, her movements fluid despite the bulk of her plate carrier. Her sniper's scope bounced against her chest, and her face was a mask of grim concentration. At

twenty-three, she possessed the hollow, cold eyes of someone who had survived the ruins of the Chechen wars before wearing an American uniform.

"Talk to me, Voss," Teal grunted, slamming a fresh magazine into his M4.

"Thermals are picking up movement in the drone hangar," she said, handing him a digital tablet. "Four contacts, high-speed. But Gunny, look at the signature. They aren't wearing standard-issue cold-weather gear. No parkas, no thermal layers. They're in full tactical combat armor—some kind of matte-white ceramic composite. It's bleeding almost zero heat."

"Spetsnaz?" Teal asked, peering at the grainy white blobs on the screen.

"Worse," Voss replied. She tapped a command on her handheld, pulling up a decrypted file from the station's offline database. "I ran the helmet profile and the HUD frequency signatures. It's not Russian. It's not Chinese. It's private. The gear matches a shell company linked to a Geneva-based defence contractor called Winterhalter AG."

Teal's jaw tightened until his teeth ached. Winterhalter. They were the bogeymen of the corporate

world, mercenaries who didn't just fight wars, they engineered them. For a private military contractor to have Arctic-capable ceramic armour and the precise coordinates of an NSA black site, this wasn't a mere raid.

"They're not here to kill us," Teal said, the realisation settling in his gut like a shard of ice. "They're here for an extraction. Hollis knew what the 'Echo' was. He was the bottleneck, so they removed him. Now they're coming for the source."

* * * * *

An explosion rocked the station, the force of it throwing Teal against the barricade. The overhead lights flickered once, twice, and then died with a pathetic whine. The facility plunged into a suffocating darkness, pierced only by the dim, crimson glow of the floor-level emergency strips.

"Everyone to the server core!" Teal roared into his tactical mic, his voice cutting through the ringing in his ears. "Fall back in pairs! Fireteams Alpha and Bravo, provide interlocking fields of fire. If you see a shadow that doesn't have a friendly IFF tag, you drop them. No warning shots. No prisoners. These people

erased twelve Marines without leaving a fingerprint. One more body won't make them blink."

The retreat was a masterpiece of controlled chaos. Teal took point, moving through the labyrinthine hallways with the predatory grace of a man who had spent half his life in the dark.

As they rounded the corner toward the laboratory wing, a figure ghosted out of a side maintenance hatch. Teal didn't hesitate. His M4's suppressor coughed three times, a rhythmic thwip-thwip-thwip stitching a burst across the intruder's chest.

The shadow collapsed, the white ceramic armour clicking against the metal floor. Teal rolled the body over, his tactical light cutting through the gloom. The soldier wore a faceless, mirrored visor that reflected Teal's own grimacing face. There were no unit patches, no dog tags, no identification of any kind. Just a single, crimson patch over the heart: a stylized, snarling winter wolf.

"Gunny, look," Voss whispered, pointing her light at the man's hand.

Clutched in the dead man's grip was a high-pressure medical syringe. The plunger was already

half-depressed and the liquid remaining inside the glass cylinder glowed with a faint, ethereal blue luminescence. It looked less like medicine and more like captured starlight.

"You seeing this, Voss?" Teal asked, his skin crawling.

"I'm recording," she said, her voice trembling slightly for the first time. "But Gunny... look at the thermals again. We've got a problem. A big one."

Teal looked at the tablet. The four contacts had turned into a swarm. "I count fifty," Voss breathed. "They're not rushing the doors anymore. They're circling the perimeter. They're herding us."

Teal did the math, and the numbers were a death sentence. Twelve defenders—mostly technicians and a handful of security personnel. Fifty elite, high-tech mercenaries. They were sitting in a tin can at the edge of the world, a thousand miles from the nearest friendly outpost. The weather report promised a blizzard that would grounded any aircraft for seventy-two hours.

He looked at the glowing blue liquid in the syringe,

then back at the heavy, reinforced door of the server room, the heart of Nord-7.

"They want whatever is in that room," Teal muttered. "And they want it intact. They think we're going to hunker down and play Alamo."

"Aren't we?" asked Sergeant First Class Delgado, a bearded giant of a man who served as the station's cook and unofficial morale officer. He stood in the doorway of the server core, clutching a combat shotgun like it was an extension of his arm.

"No," Teal said, a grim smile touching his lips. "If we stay here, we're just meat in a freezer. If they want the Echo, they can have the echoes of an explosion. We're not defending the base. We're blowing it sky high and walking to the extraction point."

Delgado's grin widened, visible even in the dim red light. "I've been waiting my entire career to hear a Marine say something that reckless, Gunny. I've got ten cases of industrial mining explosives in the sub-basement. How much do you want?"

"All of it," Teal replied. "Voss, get the data cores. Delgado, prep the charges. We're going to turn Nord-7 into the world's most expensive campfire."

As the team moved with renewed purpose, Teal looked back down the dark corridor. The wolves were coming, but they were about to find out that trapped prey bites the hardest.

The algorithm of ash

The server core was a chilled vault buried two stories beneath the permafrost, a subterranean cathedral of silicon and steel accessible only by a spiral staircase that doubled as a Faraday cage. Teal led his squad down the metal steps, each heavy bootfall echoing against the ribbed walls like a hammer striking a coffin lid. The air grew thinner and colder with every revolution, smelling of ozone and the sterile, recycled breath of a tomb. At the bottom, a monolithic blast door stood guard, six inches of titanium-reinforced steel, sealed with a biometric lock that required the unique biological signature of the facility's director, Dr. Hollis.

"He's dead, Gunny," Voss said flatly, her voice clipped by the tension. She adjusted the strap of her long-range rifle, her eyes scanning the dark recesses of the stairwell above them. "We saw the corridor upstairs. There wasn't enough left of him to fill a shoebox, let alone trip a sensor."

"He's not," Teal replied, his voice a low growl. He knelt beside a maintenance panel and pried it open with the serrated edge of his combat knife. The metal groaned in protest, revealing a frantic nest of fiber optics and redundant power cables. From an inner pocket of his tactical vest, Teal pulled out a small, airtight glass jar. Inside, suspended in clear saline, was a human eyeball. The iris was still a pale, haunting blue.

"Hollis was a paranoid son of a bitch," Teal muttered, his hands steady despite the adrenaline coursing through his veins. "He knew the risks of deep-cover intelligence. He kept spares in a cold-storage locker only he could access. I raided it before the first breach."

"That's the most revolting thing I've ever seen," Delgado whispered, his face twisting in a grimace of pure revulsion. The big man shifted his light machine

gun, the bipod clinking against his chest plate. "And I've seen you eat field rations in a monsoon, Teal."

"Welcome to intelligence work, Delgado. It's rarely elegant." Teal pressed the preserved eyeball to the retinal scanner's glowing lens. The machine hummed, a crimson beam sweeping over the dead tissue. A soft beep signaled success, the light switching to a brilliant, emerald green. Next, Teal reached into a heavy-duty evidence bag and produced Hollis's severed hand—harvested from the carnage in the upper levels. He pressed the cold, stiff palm onto the reader.

With a rhythmic thud of heavy bolts retracting, the door hissed open, venting a plume of nitrogen-cooled air.

Beyond the threshold, the server core glowed with an ethereal, haunting light. It was a forest of glass and light. Racks of quantum computers hummed at near-absolute zero, their processing power dedicated to a single, terrifying task: running Echo, the NSA's crown jewel. Echo was not a spy in the traditional sense, nor was it a kinetic weapon. It was a predictive algorithm, a digital oracle that could forecast human behaviour by ingesting every intercepted communication, every micro-transaction, every traffic camera

feed, and every heartbeat recorded by a smartwatch on the planet. Echo didn't read minds; it read the invisible patterns of existence. And according to the briefs, it was never wrong.

"They've come for Echo," Teal said, his gaze fixed on the central drive, a crystal cylinder the size of a thermos, pulsing with an internal, rhythmic light. "But Winterhalter isn't a common thief. They're a paramilitary cleaning crew. Someone sold them this coordinate, this specific vulnerability, and a very tight timeline. They're not here to rob the vault. They're here to corrupt the source code. To turn the oracle into a liar."

Voss's face went pale, the green glow of the servers casting long, skeletal shadows across her features. "If they weaponise that algorithm, if they can manipulate the predictions to target our own command structures, fake tactical orders, or collapse the entire transatlantic supply chain..."

"We lose every war before the first shot is even fired," Teal finished grimly. "So, we do something spectacularly stupid."

He stepped toward the pedestal and grabbed the crystal drive. It was surprisingly warm to the touch,

vibrating with a subtle frequency that felt almost like a pulse. It felt alive.

"Delgado, plant the C4 charges on the quantum racks. I want this room turned into a slag heap. Voss, rig the stairwell with every ounce of det cord we have left. We're going to collapse the entire core on their heads. Then, we take the drive and hump it fifty miles across the tundra to the emergency extraction beacon. Anyone who falls behind, we carry them or we bury them. No one gets left for these wolves."

The squad moved with the grim, silent efficiency of soldiers who had already accepted their own obituaries. Delgado moved amongst the racks, placing plastic explosives with the reverent tenderness of a priest at an altar. Voss worked the stairwell, stringing cord along the primary support beams to ensure a total structural failure.

Teal moved to the primary console, dialing the emergency beacon's encrypted frequency, a desperate, long-shot hope that a passing satellite might relay a distress call through the magnetic interference of the storm outside.

Instead of a burst of static, a voice answered. It was female, cultured, and possessed a Russian accent as cold as the ice shelf above them.

“Gunnery Sergeant Teal. My name is Colonel Irina Volkova. I represent the interests of the people who now effectively own this facility. You have something in your hand that belongs to us, the algorithm’s primary key. Surrender it now, and I will allow your people to walk to the extraction point unmolested. Refuse, and I will flood the lower levels with thermobaric gas. You will suffocate in the dark before you burn.”

Teal keyed the mic, a ghost of a smirk touching his lips. “You forgot one thing about the CV, Colonel.”

“And what is that, Sergeant?”

“Marines don’t negotiate with ‘owners.’ We terminate leases.” He looked at Delgado and gave a sharp, single nod. “Do it.”

Delgado hit the detonator.

The world dissolved into a blinding sheet of white thunder. The stairwell collapsed in a controlled, violent cascade, tons of pulverised ice and twisted steel plunging into the server core. The shockwave was a physical fist, throwing Teal against the reinforced concrete wall with bone-shattering force. His helmet cracked, the HUD flickering and dying. Through the

deafening ringing in his ears, he heard Voss screaming, not in pain, but in a raw, defiant fury, her rifle barking rhythmically as shadowy figures began to descend through the settling dust and smoke.

A massive hand grabbed Teal's collar, hauling him upward. It was Delgado, his face a mask of blood from a jagged gash on his scalp. "Gunny! The drive! Did you keep hold of it?"

Teal looked down. His hand was empty.

He spun around, eyes searching the chaos. The crystal cylinder lay three feet away, nestled against a rubble-crushed quantum rack. But as he lunged for it, a gloved hand, encased in sleek, white ceramic armour, reached down.

Not reaching. Taking.

A figure rose from the swirling smoke, taller and more imposing than the other mercs. Her armour was inset with a crimson wolf insignia that seemed to glow in the dying light of the servers. Colonel Volkova herself. She held the drive aloft like a scepter, her visor retracting to reveal a face defined by sharp, aristocratic angles and eyes that had seen too many

winters. A jagged scar carved her left eyebrow in two, a souvenir of a life lived on the edge of a blade.

"Your headbutt against fate is noted, Sergeant," she said, her voice carrying an amused, almost predatory lilt. "But your mission ended the moment I stepped onto this ice."

Teal lunged at her, a desperate, low tackle.

She sidestepped with the fluid grace of a dancer, slamming the butt of her rifle into his solar plexus. As he gasped for air, she reached down and flicked a master switch on the side of the drive. A high-pitched, agonizing whine filled the chamber. The remaining quantum racks flickered, their steady blue light shifting to a sickly, poisonous orange.

"Echo now belongs to me," Volkova said, her voice echoing in the ruin. "And your country will never even know what hit it. They will trust the patterns until the patterns lead them off a cliff."

She turned with a swirl of her tactical cape and walked into the thickening smoke, her guards providing a wall of suppressive fire.

Teal struggled to his feet, his ribs screaming in

protest. Around him, his squad was pinned down, trading desperate fire with Volkova's 'Wolves.' The stairwell was a tomb of twisted metal. The exits were sealed by tons of ice. And the algorithm that could predict the future was now the greatest weapon of the enemy.

He looked at Delgado, who was slamming a fresh magazine into his weapon. "New plan."

Delgado spat a glob of blood onto the floor. "How many plans do you have left in that skull, Gunny?"

Teal drew his sidearm, his eyes narrowing as he stared into the orange haze. "As many as it takes to kill them all."

The echo dies at dawn

The secondary ventilation shaft had never been intended for human passage. It was a masterpiece of utilitarian cruelty, a heat-exchange conduit designed as a narrow, frozen tube that snaked upward through two hundred feet of solid ice and permafrost. Teal had memorised the station's blueprints during his first hour on-site, a habit born from two bloody tours in Fallujah. Know the exits before you know the enemy, he told himself, though the "exits" here felt more like a vertical coffin.

"You're bloody insane, Marcus," Voss hissed. Her voice was a ragged whisper, muffled by the cramped confines as she squeezed into the shaft behind him. She pushed her long-range sniper rifle ahead of her like a battering ram, the barrel scraping against the frost-rimed metal.

"Noted," Teal grunted, his breath blooming in thick, white plumes. "Save your oxygen. Move."

The climb was a waking nightmare of claustrophobia and creeping frostbite. The shaft's interior walls wept a thin film of condensation that flash-froze to their tactical uniforms, tethering them to the metal with every momentary pause. Every ragged breath tasted of recycled copper, machine oil, and the metallic tang of blood. Below them, the distant, rhythmic thud-thud-thud of gunfire echoed upward. Volkova's 'wolves' were mopping up the upper levels with professional efficiency, but Teal had left a parting gift for the GRU remnants.

He had instructed Delgado to bypass the server core entirely. The secondary charges weren't on the data stacks; they were nestled deep within the volatile fuel storage tanks. When the wolves eventually breached the mess hall, expecting a final stand, they would find only a lone detonator and a scrap of waterproof paper that read: "Semper Fi."

Teal had no intention of being within a mile of the blast radius when Delgado triggered the sequence.

They emerged into the Arctic night like drowning men finally breaking the surface of a black sea. The

wind hit first, a seventy-knot wall of frozen fury that stole their breath and scoured their skin. It wasn't just weather; the cold was a living predator, a sentient force that hunted for every microscopic gap in their thermal gear. Teal's goggles iced over in seconds, turning his world into an opaque blur. He ripped them off with a snarl, squinting his eyes against the stinging white abyss.

Behind them, the station groaned—a deep, tectonic protest of metal under duress. Then it sank. A muffled, subterranean whump vibrated through the soles of their boots as the fuel charges detonated. The upper levels buckled, collapsing inward into the white-hot furnace of the burning server core. For a brief, surreal moment, a bruised orange light bled through the translucent ice beneath their feet like the glow of a dying sunrise trapped in a bottle.

"That's our signal!" Teal shouted over the screaming gale, his voice barely audible even to himself. "The extraction beacon is fifty miles northeast. Volkova has lost her prize, but she still has the corrupted algorithm on that portable drive. If she reaches a satellite uplink, she can transmit the Echo fragment to any rogue server on the planet. We have to intercept her before she finds a signal."

"In this?" Delgado cried, waving a gloved hand at the swirling vortex of the storm. The cook's face was a mask of rime and desperation. "Gunny, the thermal sensors are flatlining. We'll be frozen solid in two hours."

"Then we move faster," Teal barked, grabbing Delgado's shoulder and shoving him forward. "No one dies on their knees. Move!"

The next thirty-six hours dissolved into a blur of frozen hell and desperate, jagged violence. Teal led his diminishing squad across pressure ridges that cracked like rifle shots under their weight, the sea ice groaning beneath them. They navigated by dead reckoning and Delgado's uncanny, primal sense of direction. The cook had grown up in the Alaskan interior, and the Arctic was his second, unforgiving home.

Twice they spotted the wolves, white-clad shapes drifting like ghosts through the spindrift. Twice they slithered into narrow crevasses, holding their breath until the danger passed, their hearts hammering against their ribs like trapped birds.

By the second night, the squad had been winnowed down to seven. Three had vanished in an in-

stant, swallowed by thin ice over a hidden melt pool. Two more had simply reached their limit; their gait slowed, their eyes glazing over with the eerie, peaceful lethargy of advanced hypothermic shock. Teal had carried one of the communications officers for six grueling miles, his own muscles screaming, before her heart finally gave out in the lee of a jagged ice shelf. He buried her in a shallow snowdrift, marking the spot with a single spent shell casing pressed into the ice.

“She’d want us to keep going, Marcus,” Voss said, her voice hollow and thin, like snapping dry wood.

“Damn right she would.” Teal checked his manual compass, the needle dancing erratically near the magnetic pole. “Six more miles. If the beacon is active, we live. If not, we don’t. Simple maths.”

They crested the final ridge just as the storm began to break, the clouds parting to reveal a sky the colour of a fresh bruise. The extraction beacon stood on a lonely promontory overlooking a frozen fjord, a skeletal, lattice tower topped with a rhythmic, blinking red light. It was powered by a nuclear thermoelectric generator buried deep beneath the permafrost, humming with a low-frequency vibration that felt like a heartbeat.

And standing beside the humming base of the tower, waiting with a terrifying patience, was Colonel Irina Volkova.

She was alone. Her elite guard was nowhere to be seen, likely claimed by the same ice that had taken Teal's people. Her high-tech armour was cracked and scorched, her visor missing entirely. Her face was a map of frozen misery, streaked with dried blood and white patches of frostbite. Around her neck, the crystal drive dangled from a heavy lanyard, still pulsing with that sickly, unnatural orange glow.

"You're persistent, Commander," she said as Teal's exhausted squad fanned out, their frost-clogged weapons raised. Her English was flawless, sharpened by years of deep-cover intelligence work. "I admire the sheer, animal grit of it. But persistence doesn't win modern wars. Intelligence does."

She tapped the glowing drive with a gloved finger. "Echo has already predicted your next six moves. It has run the simulations. You will hesitate. You will attempt to negotiate for the lives of your remaining squad. You will try to take me alive for interrogation to satisfy your superiors. You are a creature of doctrine, Teal."

Teal lowered his rifle, the metal clicking softly.

"You're wrong, Colonel," he said, his voice raspy and cold. "Echo knows data. It knows patterns. But it doesn't know me."

He didn't wait for a reply. He closed the distance in three explosive strides, his boots crunching through the crust of the snow. Volkova raised her sidearm, her finger tightening on the trigger—but Teal didn't fire his weapon. He threw himself forward and head-butted her. It was a perfect, brutal, crown-to-bridge impact. The sound of her nose shattering was a sharp, wet crack in the silent morning air.

She went sprawling into the snow, stunned by the sheer, uncalculated thuggery of the move. She was former GRU, trained in every sophisticated martial art known to the East, but no manual prepared her for a Marine who ignored the tactical script in favour of a bar-fight gambit.

Teal knelt heavily on her chest, pinning her arms with his knees, and tore the glowing drive from her neck.

"Delgado," he rasped. "The kill switch. Now."

The cook staggered forward, producing a battered, reinforced tablet they had salvaged from the station's wreckage. It contained the one thing Volkova's ego hadn't factored in: a scorched-earth backdoor code designed by the NSA's most paranoid architects. If the Echo algorithm ever fell into enemy hands, the kill switch wouldn't just delete the local file, it would send a cascading logic bomb through the global network, wiping every fragment of the code from every hidden server on Earth. It was the nuclear option of the digital age. It would effectively blind American predictive intelligence for a decade.

Teal didn't hesitate. He typed the final authorisation code with frozen fingers.

The crystal drive flickered. The orange light stuttered, turned a violent shade of violet, and then simply died. One by one, the diagnostic lights on the beacon tower shifted from a defiant red to a steady, peaceful green.

"You fool," Volkova spat, blood bubbling from her lips and staining the snow. "You've destroyed the greatest weapon your nation ever built. You've crippled yourselves."

“No,” Teal said, standing up and looking out over the vast, empty horizon. “I just saved humanity from its own worst impulse. We aren’t meant to know the future, Irina. We’re meant to survive it.”

The extraction helicopter arrived at dawn, a black, predatory silhouette against the rising sun, its rotors chopping through the lingering curtains of mist. Teal loaded his surviving squad first, hauling Delgado and Voss into the bay. He looked back one last time at the distant, smouldering smudge on the horizon that had been Station Nord-7.

Volkova lay handcuffed in the snow, a broken figure against an infinite white canvas. She would face a tribunal; the shadowy corporate interests of Winterhalter AG would finally be dragged into the light. But the secrets, the truly ugly ones that turned men into statistics, would remain buried in the permafrost.

Voss handed Teal a battered canteen as the bird lifted off. “What’s the plan now, Gunny? Back to the real world?”

He took a long, slow drink. The water was lukewarm and tasted of plastic, but to Teal, it tasted like heaven.

"I'm going to go home and file for that divorce I've been putting off," he said, a ghost of a smile touching his cracked lips. "Then I'm going to write a short story. About a Marine who punches a Russian colonel in the face. And in my version, everyone makes it home."

Delgado let out a short, dry laugh. "Pure fiction, then?"

"Yeah," Teal said, leaning his head back against the vibrating hull of the helicopter, the dead shell of the crystal drive still clutched in his fist. "Thank God for fiction."

The helicopter climbed higher, banking toward the south. Below them, the Arctic began to reclaim the land, the blowing snow swallowing the tracks, the blood, and the last traces of the machine that had almost ended the world without firing a single shot. Marcus Teal closed his eyes and let the rhythm of the rotors take him.

One two three four. One two three four.

Semper fi.

The End

Last echo

Mike Nomads

Ovi eBook Publishing 2026

Ovi magazine
Design: Thanos

An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
©2026 Ovi Project Publication - All material is copyright of the Ovi magazine & the writer

Ovi books are available in Ovi magazine pages and they are for free.
If somebody tries to sell you an Ovi book please contact us immediately.

For details, contact: ovimagazine@yahoo.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, printed or digital,
altered or selectively extracted by any means
(electronic, mechanical, print, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the author or the publisher of this book.

MIKE NOMADS

LAST ECHO

ACTION THRILLER

Mike Nomads, an ugly divorcee middle-aged adventurer navigating the treacherous waters of family law, spending his days wrestling with legal briefs, his weekends bicycling and mountain climbing and his nights wrestling with existential dread in the form of action-packed short stories. His protagonists, thankfully fictional, never file for alimony and always manage to escape explosive situations with a witty one-liner and a perfectly timed headbutt.